Banners & Banner-Making

BY

M. LOWNDES.

Published by The Artists' Suffrage League, 259, King's Road, Chelsea.

63

ON BANNERS AND BANNER-MAKING.

Reprinted from *The Englishwoman, Sept., 1909, by permission.*

GREAT numbers of banners have been seen of late in the streets of London: some beautiful in themselves, many picturesque in effect, and some indifferently ugly and dreary. Banners, however, of one sort and another have evidently become associated with the appearance of women in public life, and it seems likely that they will continue to be so associated, to the great gain of our colourless streets and hitherto sober political gatherings.

In all the ages it has been women's part to make the banners, if not to carry them. How long ago is it that Sigurd, the conqueror of Fafnir's-bane, came to that upper chamber of doom to find Brynhild the Shieldmay at work among her maidens? She whose synonym was the byrny, who had been in battle with the mightiest, whose sword was stained with the red blood of kings, is also spoken of in the saga as one who 'could more skill in handicraft than other women.' Clothed in her coat of mail she yet sat absorbed in the task of embroidering, in gold and colours, the exploits of the hero. When the magnificent red-haired Sigurd rode away from her 'shield-hung tower,' the glorious golden-brown dragons of his coat-armour, which so dazzled the sagaman, were doubtless the handiwork of the warrior-maiden.

The divers colours of needlework, handwrought, are coming into play again, and now for the first time in history to illumine woman's own adventure. The oriflammes she made, the silken pennons of the knights, the gorgeous embroidery for the tourneys, the quaintly wrought histories of adventure—such as

the Bayeux tapestry—were all in honour and support of her favourite fighting hero. But now the fighting heros are tailor-fitted, and any flags they want can be ordered from the big manufacturers. Woman has been out of work a long time in the matter of adventurous colours. Her Church-banners alone continued to be seen and loved; in the streets, in camps, on ships, a tame uniformity or enormous size and intense vulgarity flaunt the taste of the present day for the shop article. Individual taste and fantasy, the delicate and the finely wrought, such symbols no longer appeal to the masculine idea of public life.

And now into public life comes trooping the feminine; and with the feminine creature come the banners of past times, as well as many other things which people had almost forgotten they were without.

Political colours were with us all through the Victorian era, and we were no whit the better for them. Societies have had badges galore, and the dull and ugly streets have not known it: but now with the new century has come to fruition a new thing, and colour has a fresh significance. What is the new thing? Political societies started by women, managed by women and sustained by women. In their dire necessity they have been started; with their household wit they manage them; in their poverty, with ingenuity and many labours, they sustain them.

The men look on, Are their eyes holden, or do they begin to see that in all the stress and strain is a hint of new treasures to be added to the national life?

But to return to banners, of which I must speak in particular, and in the first place draw attention to rather sorry particulars.

We noted that all the banners seen in the streets of late have not been beautiful—indeed some have been ugly enough. Whence come the ugly ones? They arise perhaps in this way.

Imagine to yourself, my reader, Miss Blank, the active Secretary of the newly-formed Branch Society of Troy Town, taking her early tea in bed in the morning. The freshly awakened

consciousness brightly seizes upon a forgotten matter. 'Good gracious!' thinks the Secretary, 'we have got no banner, and there's the big demonstration the week after next.' Distracted seconds of consideration! With fatal facility her roving eye travels to the sheet, smoothly spread before her gaze. 'Of course,' she thinks, 'White! What could be better? It will show up so well. Then we can have "Troy Town" on it in red letters. Oh, yes, and of course the name of the Union, and perhaps a motto, and a green edge. That will be delightful!'

Dear lady, it will not, it will be hideous. A banner is not a literary affair, it is not a placard: leave such to boards and sandwichmen. A banner is a thing to float in the wind, to flicker in the breeze, to flirt its colours for your pleasure, to half show and half conceal a device you long to unravel: you do not want to read it, you want to worship it. Choose purple and gold for ambition, red for courage, green for long-cherished hopes. If above these glories of colour you write in great letters 'Troy Town,' that is not now a placard, it is a dedication.

Well, then, begin all over again. Dress, and come down to the garden, leaving behind all faintest reminiscences of the bedclothes.

'If you would have glass,' wrote Theophilus the monk for his neophytes some nine hundred years ago, 'rise early in the morning and gather much beech-wood.' In the same spirit I would urge you to begin betimes if you would have a banner to plan and to consider; and you cannot consider better than by fetching in from the garden the most gorgeous flowers you can gather. Lay these together, trying contrast and harmony, and when you have got those colours you really like, decide upon them for your banner.

But in the matter of the colour, I would make one or two further suggestions.

First of all, no necessity is a hopeless bar to success. Supposing the fates, say for some heraldic reason, ordain you must use red and blue. That sounds bad; but no matter, the whole question is *what* red, and *what* blue, and you have the

whole gamut at your choice, as never before in the history of needlework.

Should the time of year permit, fetch in from the garden or from the florist's the deepest blue spike of delphinium you can lay hands on, and beside it place, not a scarlet geranium, but a crimson lobelia. What is wrong now with red and blue ?

Now from these lovely flowers learn a futher lesson in design. Fetch several crimson lobelias, and make the mass of them equal to the great mass of colour of the blue spike. Why, the thing is spoilt ! You begin to think red and blue will not look nice after all. It is not the colours that are wrong, however, it is the proportion in which they are brought together that causes discomfort, as the different proportion before gave delight.

I will illustrate this in another way. You have found a perfectly delightful pansy. Two lovely purples it shows and a golden eye. Well, then, let the banner be of two such purples and golden yellow, and we cannot go wrong. Yes, you can ; if you splurge the yellow all about instead of being very reserved with it, and treating it as most precious. If you hunt about the garden you can probably find a pansy gone wrong in just this way ; and then it is plain to be seen that the secret of the first pansy was not just two purples and some yellow.

Or take a great red poppy, with its cool green stem and foliage, and wonderful purple black in the inside. You can model a splendid banner on that poppy, but not by spotting red over with purple-black letters. See how Nature has flung out the red, and the reserve of her blacks ; notice the subordinate part the greens play. You cannot use too strong or too brilliant colour, only you must use it with cunning.

But to leave the question of colours for the moment, let us consider form. After all what shape is the banner to be ? Again, I would say—avoid any tendency to think favourably of the bedclothes ; a sheet between two poles is a poor ideal. I know it has its conveniences for street processions, but after all we do not make and carry banners for our convenience—it is indisputably more convenient to walk about without them.

'Who takes the eye takes all' we are instructed by *Sapolio*. Fling to the winds convenience, and make your banner, whether for two poles or one, in the most beautiful form, namely to my thinking, as a parallelogram depending longways from a cross-bar.

The upper edge must be devised for attachment to the bar, and do not despise the nice adjustment of such devices; in the cutting of the lower edge exhibit your fancy, and give the breezes a chance.

The outward shape being settled, if the banner is to be composed, as suggested, with various colours, on what plan shall they be combined? Here many considerations should be brought forward, and in each individual case there is much, of course, to determine the device that should be displayed. In a general way I would say, however, be guided by simple rules of heraldry. If you want to have two purples composing the ground, mingle them by adopting some heraldic divisions of the field, as applied usually to a colour and a metal. You may think over *nebulée*, *ragulée*, *indented*, *engrailed*, as a method for bringing two edges together; your field may be *barred*, *fretty*, or *billetée*, the *chevron*, the *bend*, or the *saltire* may break its surface. There are a score of ways such as Ispeak of, some simple and easy, as the fesse; some only to be attempted by most skilled workers, as the blue and white of vair and counter-vair. In this fancy heraldry of ours we need not be bound by laws as of Medes and Persians, and the rule may be often, I think, honoured by non-observance which prescribes 'Do not charge metal on metal, or colour on colour, but the contrary.' There will also arise occasions when its strict observance would be most seemly. One thing I would like to lay down as a most important axiom. Make all your charges fill the field as far as they may decoratively. Nothing looks more mean than a large plain surface with, say, three wretched little martlets spotted on to it. If three martlets are to sit upon your fess crowd them up, head to tail, and make a good show of them.

I have spoken hitherto of dividing up a field for decorative reasons, but it is obvious most banners require as well something more purposeful. Well, use the old symbols always when they will serve, but try and use them in a new way ; for it is a new thing we are doing. For instance, in Norfolk and Suffolk the crowns and arrows of St. Edmund meet us in every town, so we want them on our East Anglian banner, not forgetting the head of the pious wolf to remind us of many savage things, and the taming of them. But there is no need, in devising such a banner, that we should follow the colours or the precise arrangement of the county arms.

In all decorative matters a little knowlegde of heraldry is of value. A certain Society has proclaimed its colours as green, white, and silver. This is a pity, as from time immemorial white and silver have been held to be decorative equivalents, Argent ; either to be expressed by white satin, or white calico, or burnished silver, as the fancy takes you.

A little must now be said on the subject of material. Never use anything ugly because it is expensive or because it is cheap. Do not use the wrong colour or the wrong tone because you have a piece of something 'over' which would 'just do.' If it is not exactly right it won't do at all.

Every shade and colour can be got in London in silks, faced cloths, and velvets, but to find exactly what you want may take some time. The quest if weary is worth while, and even if you wander all the way from High Street, Kensington, to Covent Garden, pausing at innumerable shops, call the time well spent if you return at last with the needed yard or two of material exactly the colour you went forth to find.

'Can we make the banner ourselves ?' is a question often asked by the inexperienced. I would reply to it with another inquiry. If you want a new pair of winter curtains for your dining-room, can you make them yourself, so that they shall hang straight and true and the linings be not puckered ? If you can, I think you can make the banner. If such a task is beyond you, there are many women competent to undertake it, and you must call in the more-experienced worker.

And now for a word as to expense. The silks and velvets you want need not cost very much, as they are not for wear or for handling, but merely to be looked at. How to manage the necessary metals—gold and silver—I cannot enter into here, as the explanations required would be somewhat elaborate; but the cost of them need not be great. Besides these materials, banner-makers must not fail to think of lining and inter-lining, likewise of cords with their tassels, and of fringes, if needed. These fringes, I would remark, may run away with a good deal of money; skilful and ingenious people will make them at home, and they should bear in mind that shining hanks of a material bearing the mysterious name 'mercerised cotton' may be had at low prices in all beautiful colours.

The expense of the whole banner, however, cannot be even roughly indicated, for all depends upon the design, and also upon what is paid for the design, and from first to last remember that is the one thing most worth paying for. If the design is bad, for twenty pounds you will not get a banner worth looking at; if the design is good and practical, you may make a fine thing for three, and make it yourself.

M. LOWNDES.

[T.O.

Certain Practical Suggestions.

PERHAPS the best size for a single-pole banner is 3-ft. 2-in. broad by 4-ft. 6-in. long. The Artists' Suffrage League has invented a double hook, made on the lines of those used for Church banners, which is fixed to the upright pole at about one foot from the top, and which prevents the banner from swinging round when carried ; it may be obtained from the Secretary, price 6d.

A good size for a double-pole banner is 50 inches broad by six feet long. This is the size of most of the banners made under the directions of the Artists' League, though some are a little larger. It will be found that banners 4-ft. 6-in. wide by 6-ft. 6-in. long are as large as women bearers can carry should there be any wind. A very good screw hook, proved to be the simplest and most secure method of mounting the double-pole banner, is to be had from the Artists' League, price 4d. each. These were invented for Suffrage use, and are forged by a Chelsea smith.

The cross-bars used should be about three inches longer than the width of the banner. Poles should be nine feet long for both single and double sized banners. For poles and cross-bars nothing is better or cheaper than lengths of rounded wood (like broomstick handles), $1\frac{1}{8}$-in. in diameter, which may be obtained at a penny per foot from any wood-yard, and may be painted or gilded as desired. These are better than bamboo poles, they look much better and are safer, since bamboo is liable to split when any strain is put on the plugs necessary for adjusting the screw-hooks.

Arrow-heads to be fixed at the apex of the pole and ends of the cross-bar, made of turned wood, may be obtained from any flag-maker for from 2d. to 6d. each, and are easily painted or gilded by the banner-maker.